



Wellbeing Insights

CAUTION: 'Long middle' – fragile motivation, handle with care!

When it comes to the formal processes of goal-setting and goal-striving, an individual generally loves the feeling of making progress. With progress we often become more motivated and our commitment to our goal increases. However, according to leading motivational science researcher, Dr. Ayelet Fishbach from the University of Chicago, we need to be wary of having 'long middles'.

It is quite common for us to 'slack-off' somewhere in the middle of our goal pursuit. At the commencement of our goal-striving, we are generally full of intrinsic motivation having just committed to the goal and with enthusiasm we go about making progress. As we approach the end of our goal, we are also generally excited about how close we are, and this inspires us to stick at it as we feel confident and optimistic about reaching our goal. However, somewhere in the middle we can lose motivation – the freshness of the goal has worn off and the end also doesn't feel close enough to spur us on. For many of us, this waning motivation in the middle of our goal-pursuit is when we can become unstuck. Fishbach refers to this common tendency as 'slacking in the middle'.

What does Fishbach suggest as a way to combat this challenging middle period? Quite simply, yet quite cleverly, she encourages individuals to have shorter time goals as this directly results in there being less of the 'middle'. Of course, setting long-term goals is important but if we can break them down into multiple short to medium term goals then on each occasion, we can receive the inspiration at the start of the goal and the energy boost as we near the end of the goal.

Interestingly in our society, it seems we rarely throw a party in the 'middle'. We often have celebrations at the commencement of a new chapter (O-week, School camps, Induction events...) and we often throw a party at the end of a chapter (Graduation, End of season, Retirement...) but the middle times are ordinary, and they don't call for celebrations. The middle is often when it is hardest to maintain our enthusiasm and motivation.

Is there a way you can celebrate your 'middle', or is there a way you can shorten your goal timeline so that you have less 'middle' time? Best wishes with your ongoing progress with your goals.